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EROTICS OF THE GUN: GENDER, GEO-POLITICS AND INFLATABLE SEX DOLL OF THE WASTELANDS

By

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas

Four years after the release of Atsushi Yamatoya's *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands*, snuff film was born. Or, to be more technically correct, the words "snuff film" were first deployed to describe movies which were believed to capture real death on camera. Ed Sanders' book *The Family: The Story of Charles Manson's Dune Buggy Attack Battalion* (1971) was the first time the words "snuff films" appeared together, used in relation to claims that amongst the zeitgeist-defining horrors Manson and his Family cult were responsible for - most notably the Tate-LaBianca murders in 1969 that made headlines around the world - they were also making home movies of real killings at their notorious Spahn Ranch, a one-time movie location-turned-base camp for Manson and his ghoulish followers.

The rumored Manson snuff films were not of course the first time real death had been captured on film, with Thomas Edison's *Execution of Czolgosz with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (1901) indicating a fascination with real death is almost as old as cinema itself. And this human desire to capture authentic depictions of death, torture and bodily trauma of course long predate the moving image. Drawings of cadavers were once the primary method for studying the human body for would-be medical practitioners, and both Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci produced anatomical sketches based on dissections. Caravaggio was alleged to use the bloated, drowned body of a sex worker as a model for his painting "Death and the Virgin" (1606), while Théodore Géricault painted highly detailed studies of severed heads and limbs in the early 20th century, keeping body parts from a local hospital in his studio and studying them as they decayed. Transposed to visual narrative storytelling, Paris's *Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol* specialized in the depiction of realistic violence, particularly in their *faits divers* plays that were sensational and

often lurid news stories vividly reenacted on stage. And while apocryphal, one infamous statistic claimed that *Grand Guignol* superstar Paula Maxa was the “victim” of (simulated) live murder over 10,000 times, and rape over 3,000.

Maintaining this focus on gendered violence and purported claims that fictional depictions of rape and sexual torture in art are in fact real, this broad yet brief snapshot of the creative compulsion to portray violence as a legitimately authentic phenomenon returns us quite directly to the infamous film-within-a-film at the heart of *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands*. Discussions about this film - and, indeed, of these sequences in particular - tend to highlight how it notably predated the 1970s rise in western exploitation films of what I have elsewhere called ‘snuff fictions’; fictional screen narratives that pivot around the existence of what, within the confines of the story world, is presented as authentic or “real” snuff movies. While this phenomenon goes back at least to Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960) - again long predating the actual coining of the phrase “snuff films” - from the 1970s onwards this trope would boom, at first in exploitation movies like *Last House on Dead End Street* (Roger Watkins, 1977) and *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980), as well as increasingly mainstream American films such as *Hardcore* (Paul Schrader, 1979), *Special Effects* (Larry Cohen, 1985), *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), *8mm* (Joel Schumacher, 1999), and *Vacancy* (Nimród Antal, 2007).

The film-within-a-film in *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* of course doesn’t pertain to depict actual murder, but - according to the narrative logic active within the film itself - it is certainly presented as and understood by our doomed protagonist Jō / Shō (Yūichi Minato) as actual, real footage of Sae’s rape and sexual torture. As an audience, we at first watch this film-within-a-film with Jō and his client Naka (Masayoshi Nogam) as the latter attempts to get the former to understand how urgent and dire his position is. Remarkably, we move from the room where Jō and Naka sit watching the scratchy film back and forth into the dingy space where the rape and torture of Sae is taking place, the camera moving dramatically in towards her vulnerable, abused body with shameless intimacy. Cutting back to Jō and his response, he is in effect our kind of surrogate within the world of the actual film; there is implicitly here a kind of metatextual acknowledgement of our *own* complicity as observers as

we too are in a sense held to account for such perverse voyeurism. Later in the film we learn that films such as these are being made for profit, seeking to attract a paying audience whose motives may ultimately be no less wholesome than those of our own. Somehow, almost magically, *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* manages to both implicitly expose, critique and demonize such consumption, while at the same time actively profiteering from it.

Here and elsewhere in *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands*, women are commodities, to be bought, sold, traded, and consumed. Yamatoya's emphasis throughout the film on mannequins and dummies, and indeed the explicit inclusion of the "sex doll" in the film's very title, make the objectification of women something increasingly literal - women are not active, subjective agents capable of thoughts and feelings and with their own free will, but rather plastic, commodified *things* for men to use for their own pleasure and/or as bargaining chips or negotiating tools with other men. At first, this might make it tempting for contemporary western audiences in particular to dismiss the film and its gender politics as necessarily regressive and offensive, and typical of the kind of broader challenging nature of pink film as a whole when it comes to the glorified and sensational depiction of violence against women.

But it's far more complicated than that. As a rich and complex branch of cinema's global exploitation traditions, I am constantly drawn to and fascinated by pink films like *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* for just how ambivalently they engage with gender politics as a broader concept. On one hand, these films do not attempt to disguise their intention of deploying violence against women as a grotesque kind of sexy razzle-dazzle to titillate their assumed male audiences, a creative choice that necessarily pivots on some pretty bleak assumptions about the ethical calibre of their (male) viewing public. But at the same time, these movies also - whether consciously or not, to me it almost doesn't matter - engage with and explore aspects of gender politics that almost all other kinds of filmmaking willfully shirk from.

Most immediately, watching *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* from my position as a contemporary western viewer, I am struck by how powerfully its conscious and deliberate way of provocatively presenting women

as commodities taps into the somewhat bleak legal history of sexual violence as a crime: rape only became a criminal offence not because of the harm it did to women who were victims of it, but because it was basically considered a property crime between men, the damaging and legally culpable infliction of harm to something men *owned*. It is from this perspective that upon repeated viewings, I am consistently struck by just how ferociously tragic *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* feels on this front, and not merely because of Jō's fate. While the bleak tone certainly adheres to the kind of nihilism intrinsic to Japan's broader postwar / post-Hiroshima national trauma, the way that those final moments so vividly reduce human women to sex dolls speaks to a much broader, more global understanding of how women have been historically - and indeed, are still often today - brutally commodified, reduced to nothing more than things to sexually service male consumers.

While the reach of such a metaphor in *Inflatable Doll of the Wastelands* may be depressingly global and still contemporary in its scope, in relation to pink cinema traditions especially the Japanese specificity of such imagery also cannot be underplayed. When Japan surrendered to the Allies in September 1945, the country was occupied by forces led primarily by the American military under the infamous General Douglas MacArthur, who was granted the role by then president Harry S Truman. Between the end of the war in late 1945 and the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco in early 1952, close to a million Allied soldiers were involved in the Occupation of Japan. Driven at first by a motivation to punish Japan for its involvement in the War, the role of the Allied forces on paper at least soon turned to one of facilitating reform. Key figures in the Japanese suffragette movement such as Ichikawa Fusae mobilized during this period in the hope that the dramatic, explicitly westernised social and political changes that marked this moment would also improve the rights of Japanese women, and it was in this context that Japanese women were granted the right to vote in October 1945. But in reality, this moment was far from victorious for Japanese women. Fearing a return to the enforced sexual slavery of women like that installed by the Imperial Japanese army in World War II, during the occupation the Japanese established the RAA (Recreation and Amusement Association) which has been described as a kind of "brothel system" whose mission it was to euphemistically "service"

hundreds and thousands of Allied troops who were deployed in Japan during this period. Hoping that this system would reduce the desire for Allied soldiers to rape Japanese women, the RAA issued a public call for “experienced” women to offer their sexual services for their country. But the grim economic realities of the time meant that many of the women who answered these ads were hardly autonomous - in some instances, very young women were pressured into working for the RAA as a means of supporting their whole families.

A mass outbreak of venereal disease soon saw the RAA shut down, but even today there is still heated debate about how - if at all - the RAA impacted rape statistics in Japan during this period. Allied forces - especially Americans - heavily censored Japanese media during this period, and because rape as a crime already tended to go broadly unreported, public records can be deceptive. What remains clear, however, is that this period of occupation was a complicated one for Japanese women. While the hard work that went into winning Japanese women the right to vote should be celebrated, just in relation to the RAA and the reality that had on the lives of so many Japanese women alone, it was clear that sex, gender and imbalances in power played a significant role in the way that Japan experienced the occupation. That so many pink film directors of the ‘60s and ‘70s literally grew up in the shadow of the war and things like the RAA and its socio-cultural fallout in part at least can help us understand today from a geo-political perspective why so many would go on to address subjects such as sex work and sexual violence in pink films that are otherwise ostensibly meant to be titillating sexploitation. Add to this anecdotal accounts that film actresses at some major studios during this period were effectively pimped out by their agents and were forced to live double lives as sex workers as well, and the immediacy of these themes in particular in this early burst of pink films feels even more urgent.

Like so many global exploitation film traditions, pink cinema was largely a boys’ club, but it is impossible to tell the story of *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* without paying significant attention to the central roles of two women in particular, producer Keiko Sato and actress Noriko Tatsumi. While not a major character in any practical sense, Tatsumi

was even at this early stage of pink film history one of its biggest names, broadly considered the queen of the form in its early heyday. Although she was only a mere 19-years-old when *Inflatable Doll of the Wastelands* was originally released in Japan in early October 1967, she had by this stage already appeared in an impressive five pink films that were released earlier that year, including an astonishing five pink films already: Shintaro Kishi's *Double Docking*, Kinya Ogawa's *Memoirs of a Modern Female Doctor*, Mamoru Watanabe's *Slave Widow*, Kôji Seki's *Taste of Women*, and Osamu Yamashita's *Clutches*. With Seiki she would go on to make further pink films such as *Whore* - which came out a fortnight after *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* - and 1969's *Erotic Culture Shock: Swapping Partners*. Her work as a screen actress was limited to a mere two year window - she had fully retired by 1969 - but during that period she had made a whopping 22 films.

While largely invisible behind the camera, Sato is - along with Yamatoya himself - one of the key names associated with *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands*. While this is hardly the place to relitigate the key debates surrounding auteur theory at length, as major critics like Pauline Kael have argued there are fundamental flaws in the now widely accepted assumption that the director is the key author of a given film text. This is particularly relevant when looking at the role of women in the history of the global film industry; while women have been broadly remained (and still remain) a shocking minority when it comes to directing, if we expand our notion of 'filmmaker' to include producers, screenwriters and editors (just for starters), we start to develop a more nuanced, more complex picture. In many ways then from this perspective Sato is a significant figure in the history of pink film, surely as important from a gender political perspective as women pink film directors who emerged primarily in the industry from the 1980s onwards, such as Rumi Tama, Sachi Hamano and Yumi Yoshiyuki.

If Sato's name isn't at first immediately recognizable, this may be because she predominantly worked under the *nom de plume* "Daisuke Asukara", a cheeky wordplay on the Japanese phrase "we like sex in the morning". As such, her signature can be found on some of the most famous and most influential pink films ever made, including Kan Mukai's *Blue Film Woman*

(1969), Mamoru Watanabe's *Women Hell Song* (1970), Masao Adachi's *A Gushing Prayer* (1971), and Masayuki Suo's *Abnormal Family* (1984). As the president of Kokuei productions, Sato was at the forefront of pink film during this period in particular, and as Florence Woolley at *Mubi Notebook* noted:

The films produced by Sato exploit the potentiality of Pink Cinema through wild experimentation, complex narratives, compelling characters and political appropriations, all of which became the markers of the directors' continued success. These attributes are no doubt a manifestation of Kokuei's ambitions led by Sato's audacious artistry. Whilst lots of people may now be aware of Pink Cinema, they will most likely not be aware that it was spearheaded by a woman, whose role was paramount to the success of these bizarre films.

Sato relished - and indeed, as she is still very active in the industry, still relishes - the creative side of production and would often read scripts, with a particular fondness for directors whose passion and creative vision would inspire them to push back against her.

In a 2018 interview with *Arsenal*, Sato discussed her introduction to the industry:

I had no interest in "pink film", it just entered my life somehow. In 1964, I was working as an office lady at an electrical company called Hitachi Seisakusho. I was friends with the son of the president of the Kokuei film company, Kazuyuki Yamoto, who started to work at Kokuei straight after he graduated from university. The company had shown a short film from the USA called "Sexy Route 66", which had led to more than 10 Kokuei employees and the president being arrested for obscenity. Only a few employees were left in the office. Four other friends and I used to go to Kokuei after our normal jobs and on weekends to help out. All five of us ended up working for Kokuei. The usual salary for a new graduate was 14,800 yen at that time and they said they'd pay us 20,000 yen, so we went for it.

She continued:

I was a good friend of Kaoru Umezawa, who was an assistant director to Koji Wakamatsu. Umezawa asked me to be his producer when he made his first film as a director. I was also good friends with Chusei Sone, who worked for Nikkatsu, so I asked him to write the script. In 1965, Umezawa directed 十代の呻吟 (*Judai no umeki*). That became my debut as a producer. In those days, we could spend a decent amount of time on production and there weren't many restrictions. We stayed at a luxury *ryokan* to write the script. At the beginning of my time at Kokuei, I wasn't a producer. Back then, I was responsible for the production management side.

In this same interview, reflecting upon her decades-long career, Sato also gives astonishing insight into her experience as not just a woman producer specifically, but a woman producer whose experiences changed as she got older:

I think the directors had a harder time with the fact that I was a woman. I wasn't an older woman like I am today, I was in my 20's then, and every time I produced a film with one of the first generation of "pink film" directors such as Koji Wakamatsu, Kan Mukai or Mamoru Watanabe, the other directors would get jealous. "Are you going out with him?" they'd ask me. So I thought I shouldn't be with anyone in particular and should stay single. On the other hand, they really took good care of me. I was younger than them and didn't know much. I can say it was a happy time. The second generation of directors were closer to my age group, like Atsushi Yamatoya, Kaoru Umezawa and Masao Adachi. The third generation of directors, Banmei Takahashi and Kazuo Komizu, are younger than me.

To quote Sato herself here at length is vital when it comes to centering both her work and her voice as a significant creative force in *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* and her broader enormous donation to the field of pink cinema. While not the only woman to work in sex films during

this period - international parallels might be found in filmmakers like Doris Wishman and, later, Roberta Findlay, although their work is very different to Sato's - this very diversity amplifies perhaps how careful we should be when it comes to ascribing a simple or reductive ideological perspective tethered solely to the gender of the filmmaker in question. In the case of both Wishman and Findlay, for example, although scholars and critics have described their work as "feminist" (and frequently present very compelling reasons for doing so), in the case of these two filmmakers at least they are explicitly on the record with their notably *anti* feminist public stances.

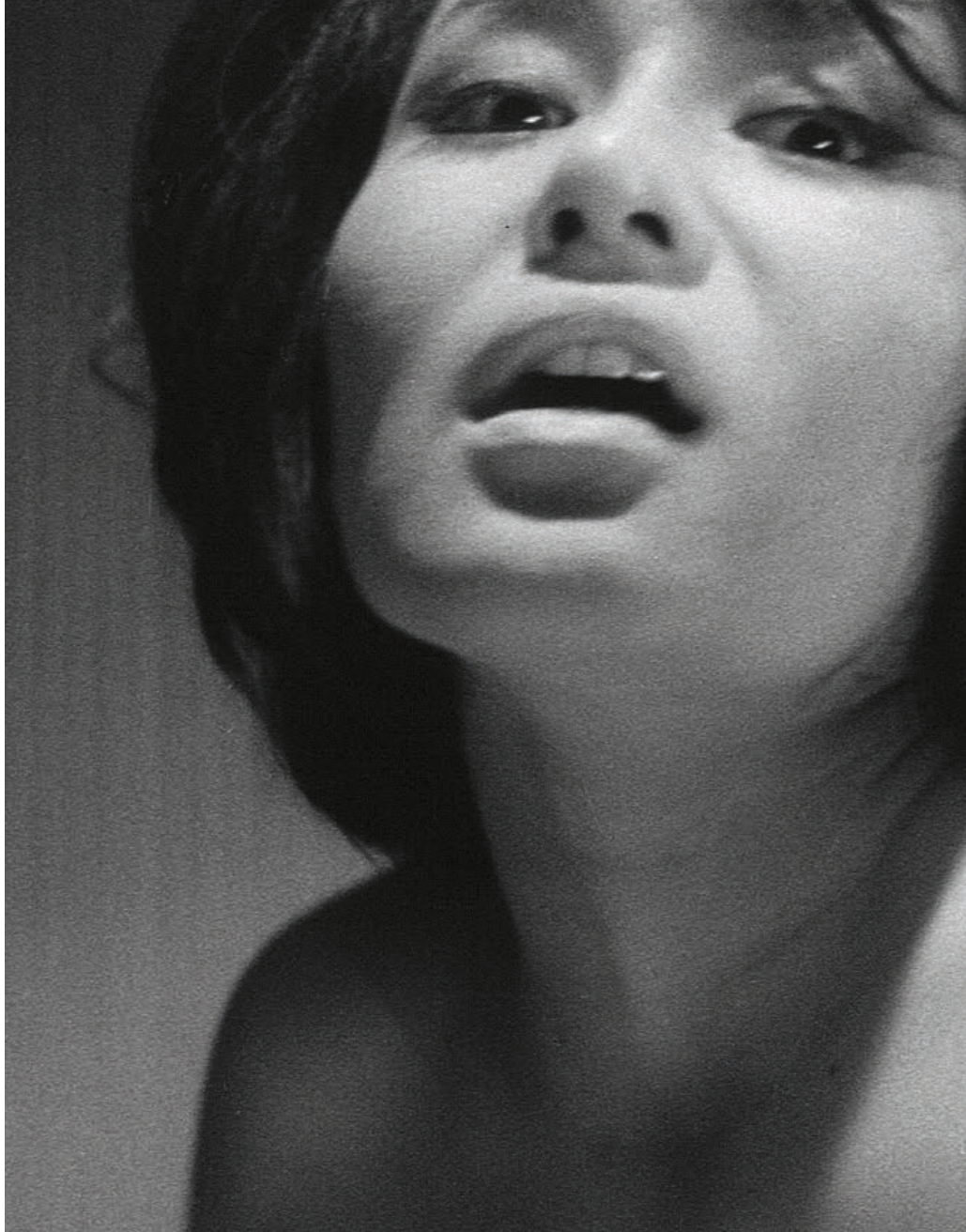
To contort the reality of *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* beyond recognition in order to adhere to some kind of retrospective label like "feminist" or "progressive" is not merely reductive but demands a kind of rhetorical gymnastics that I find neither appealing nor necessary. The joy of exploitation film - in all its peculiar, perverse and myriad forms - is that it can be at once offensive *and* appealing, progressive *and* regressive, centered openly on male sexual pleasure and, at the same time, able to speak to the objectification *and* commodification of women in at times starkly critical terms. This is the beauty of exploitation cinema, and this accounts for the enduring potency and unwaveringly intriguing allure of *Inflatable Doll of the Wastelands* in particular.

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INFLATABLE SEX DOLL OF THE WASTELANDS

By

Walter Chaw

He's at a crossroads on a hot, secluded pass, the wastelands of the title, and he's there to make a deal. The Devil, Naka (Seigi Nogami), in the guise of a real estate executive in cheap suit and sunglasses, pulls up to him in an air-conditioned sedan with an offer. Maybe it's not the Devil, maybe he's not even a demon, but there's not much of a question he's in hell and he has an offer to make. They're both in hell, Naka and Shô / Jô (Yûichi Minato), the idiot gumshoe waiting for a job in the middle of nowhere and the mark - the simp with the cash with maybe an ace up his sleeve. This is how legendary screenwriter Atsushi Yamatoya sets up his feature debut as director (*Season of Betrayal* from the year before is a co-directed feature with Koji Wakamatsu): a *pinku eiga* on the one hand, though barely that I would argue, and during this specific period the distinction seems almost arbitrary if not actually malicious; and a brilliant takedown of *noir* conventions on a par with stuff like Godard's *Breathless* and Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*. What I'm saying is *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* is a masterpiece.

Shô, feeling real slick sweating through his straw fedora and trenchcoat, tries to light a cigarette with a broken Zippo. It's three o'clock. He knows that because that's when his girlfriend was murdered five years ago. What Naka wants to give Shô is a lot of money and a mission to find the four men who abducted and continue to rape his office girl/mistress Sae (Noriko Tatsumi) and film themselves doing it. Half now, half when it's done. Oh, Naka doesn't want them brought to justice, he wants them murdered. "What will you use?" he asks Shô. "A gun." Naka is disappointed it's not going to be a knife but solicitors of dirty work can't be choosers. Besides, Shô's supposed to be the best. But we have our doubts about that because he can't even light a butt on the first strike which, given the Freudian vernacular of *noir*, marks him as a limp dick, private or not. He

hears things, too, like the ringing of an abandoned phone, tossed by the road, its wires exposed, triggering an image (he couldn't have seen) of Shô's own girlfriend (Mari Nagise) being raped and murdered by his buddy Kô (Shôhei Yamamoto) while trying to reach him in vain. Is this how he'll act whenever he sees a telephone? If you ask me, Shô seems a little twitchy.

He hears his dead girlfriend screaming in his head, sees an image of a clock, a switchblade, his girl, wide-eyed and hopeless as his friend's hand closes over her mouth. Why wasn't he there for her? What kind of student of human nature can he be that he didn't see his pal as a rapist and murderer? Isn't that his job? How much of her death is his fault? I think he's haunted. I think he's a ghost. Saka asks Shô to take a walk with him and Yamatoya cuts to credits while Yôsuke Yamashita's trailblazing score, half noisy jazz improvisation courtesy of his quartet at the time (composed of Yamashita, Motoharu Yoshizawa, Yoshisaburo Toyozumi and Seiichi Nakamura) and half ancient Japanese *shomyo* chanting, neatly deconstructs the *Nûberu bâgu*, the Japanese New Wave that, like its French and American counterparts, looked to its youth to upend traditional cinematic tropes. Out with the stodgy conservatism of the old, in with the nihilistic chaos of the new. If you're expecting woodwinds and gongs, you gotta get your head in the game, Jack. Yôsuke's work here rivals Ennio Morricone's contemporary experiments in marrying instrumentation with the human voice in his collaborations with Sergio Leone while presaging Miles Davis' score for Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows*. It establishes *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* as firmly, defiantly Mod; nervy sax, after all, engorges anything with its sleazy urgency and the alcohol-stench of doom.

Saka takes Shô to a tree, standing by itself with a glass jar lodged in one of its limbs, and asked to see proof of Shô's gunmanship. If Shô was on the ball, he'd ask how the tree with the jar would have tested his knife skills but Shô, as we've noted, is not on the ball. Irritated, Shô shoots the jar with his first pull, but then proceeds to empty his gun into the tree to Saka's horror. I don't know why Saka cares about the tree, but the image of it toppling slowly is another impotence metaphor in a film already loaded with them. The tree falls and Saka takes Shô to his home, arriving just in time to answer a phone from Saka's tormentors. We hear a woman

screaming in the background and men cackling. Saka lets Shô listen and, reluctantly, he does. I wonder if Shô can tell the difference between what he always hears when he sees a phone and what he's listening to now. I wonder, too, if what's happening now is actually happening now and not a supernatural mindfuck: the kind of infernal trickery that fashions an eternity's damnation into an infinite replaying of the one defining trauma that landed you in hell in the first place. "Her name's Sae," Sako says while breaking the fourth wall, staring "off into space" in something like stunned reverie but also inviting us into the horror, pointedly, by indicting our prurient curiosity. We want to lay our eyes on the unspeakable violations we're eavesdropping on. A good portion of *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* is invested in asking what kind of person is an audience for a film like not just the snuff film that is its MacGuffin, but *this* film, Yamatoya's film - what has WWII done to the Japanese that their culture would now Balkanize between the extremely cute and the unbearably nihilistic?

The title itself, is a different kind of bait in English than Japanese. Released at various times and in various territories as *Dutch Wife of the Wasteland* and *The Dutch Wives of the Wild* (and the wildly-misleading *Horror Doll*) in its native form, it's 荒野のダッチワイフ (Kôya no Datchi Waifu) which translates literally into "Dutch Wife in the Wilderness." A "Dutch Wife" in this context is a maybe a reference to how the Dutch would spend a lot of time away from home, once upon a time, and so construct a snuggle-buddy out in the wild to keep them company on lonely nights. The Chinese have a variant called a "Bamboo Wife" (竹夫人, zhúfūrén) that is literally a curved pillow (body-sized, but shaped like those neck supporters you can buy in the airport for long flights) used for lower back pain or to expose the body to better airflow. A Japanese variant is called dakimakura (抱き枕), a "comfort pillow" that gradually evolved into a sex doll, as one does, but not as far as I can tell an inflatable one. I wonder if the adjective was added because no one in the United States knows what a "Dutch Pillow" is and would misconstrue "Sex Doll" as shorthand for a human sex slave. Clarifying the term, however, untangles some of the intentional complexity of the film: we're meant to conflate inanimate objects with sexualized women; we're meant to feel exposed as men for how easily our sexual obsessions strip women, sometimes fatally for them, of their humanity.

Yamatoya teases us when Saka hangs up the phone. He gives us a shot of Pinku goddess Noriko Tatsumi in the altogether: bedraggled and bound, and we brace ourselves for her humiliation. But Yamatoya cuts to a grainy 8mm print of her rape, projected onto a dirty screen in Saka's house as Saka narrates a chain of events leading to it to Shô. "What a cruel treatment" he says - and then we see Saka *in the 8mm film*, tied to a chair, forced to watch from the front row as his beloved is ravaged. Shô is sanguine about it, trying unsuccessfully again to light his cigarette. This guy can't even get it up in the dark for a stag film. "It's all scratched up," he complains, mirroring our complaint that we can't really see any of the "good" stuff, the violation of Sae who is, after all, a human being if a pretend one played by one of the most beautiful women in Japanese cinema. Is that the buffer we need to allow ourselves pleasure at the sight of a depiction of criminal assault? Why do people watch rape films - or serial killer movies since we're on the topic - but to satisfy some sort of scopophilia tethered to atrocity? Do we console ourselves that if we knew the rape was real we would refuse to witness it? That it would blunt our pleasure? Well, of course, you know, but I'm not sure. Pascal Plante's *Red Rooms* plays in this space... so does Park Chan-wook's *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*. Maybe you're less in control of your sexual impulse than you like to believe.

Saka engages us in this sidebar when he agrees the film is nicked up, explaining how "I've played the film for hundreds of times so maybe it's all scratched. I can still see every single detail." Why has Saka watched it hundreds of times? Note how Yamatoya offers a view of the crime that could not have been caught by the assailants' handheld camera - how these sequences are crystal-clear and shot from different angles. Note how easily the line between the play and the play-within-the-play has been blurred for us just as how Saka's look through the camera at our greedy expressions has erased the moral distance we've tried to establish between what should never be seen and how we lean forward to see better. Of all the emotions provoked by film, the one that surfaces the least in polite discourse is *desire*. I love how all of Pauline Kael's anthology titles are *double entendres* that equate the act of watching movies with being deflowered, achieving orgasm, of being horny. Horror as a genre complains about being dismissed in scholarly, intellectual contexts but

what of “Pink” films - what of pornography? Kael got at least that. Movies are intimate by their nature. They are a collaboration with their observers. They awaken under our touch and we under theirs. Saka has watched the rape of his girlfriend “hundreds of times” because his humiliation - through hers, but not hers - is an onanistic fetish for him. Look at his face as he watches it with Shô. Ecstasy. Look at Shô’s face: boredom with an unlit cigarette dangling limp and useless from his lower lip.

The elements of *films noir* are set now from the stark black and white of Masaru Mori’s cinematography (Seijun Suzuki’s DP on his *A Tale of Sorrow*) to the fallen private dick and his cigarettes to the *femme fatale* in Sae: the sexually dangerous woman an obsession which will lead our dick into deep waters. Towards the end of the film, it’s revealed that Sae’s elderly father has been watching unseen from the back of the room. He has an attack, a doctor is summoned, and later we learn that his “fort da” for his lost daughter is a talking sex doll. He takes solace, in other words, for his missing child in a doll that is created for the purpose to which his daughter is being put to. A doll doesn’t have the facility to consent nor object to its violation, but what does it mean when we create sex dolls that look like children? Our children? “He’s playing with it day and night,” Saka says, indulgently like a parent would. We are in a nightmare. We are in the belly of the worm that is in the process of eating itself.

Shô takes half his pay and sets off, the hardboiled detective on the case. He walks through a long corridor heavy with pale phallic columns while Yamatoya intercuts images of fashion mannequins gazing suggestively from storefront windows. Actually, they’re not sexy, you know, they’re just molded that way. Men can imagine a come-on from a suggestively-shaped tree trunk or couch. I think of the line from *Bull Durham* where a wizened seductress reveals “men will listen to anything if they think it’s foreplay.” It’s an extraordinary sequence borrowed by the moments leading up to Deckard’s battle with the pleasure-droid Pris in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*. Hiding among her ancestors, the models and toys decorating an engineer’s apartment, she sits stock still with only her eyes tracking her quarry’s progress through the dark. Pris is a piece of plastic that has developed a sense of self-preservation. It’s not her fault - like Isserley in Michel Faber’s *Under the Skin*, it’s not even female - but it doesn’t prevent her being murdered by a man. Eschewing his Zippo at

last, Shô fires up a cig with a match and returns the plastic stares - he is no less manufactured, his erudition and masculinity no less an illusion crafted for show and profit, than the mannequins. We know this part of the film is very likely a dream because you're not convincing me that Shô is suddenly Humphrey Bogart. Shô beats up a guy for information and learns that he might be able to kill two birds with one stone as one of the men responsible for Sae's rough treatment might be the same pal, Kô, who murdered his girlfriend. Yamatoya flashes back to Shô arriving at the scene of her death too late to do anything, the knight errant-turned-pathologist, his shadow falling on the telephone swinging from its cradle as cruel indication that she tried to call him for help but he just wasn't listening. Did she call for him, though? Did she call because of him? I'm not so sure Shô is a reliable narrator.

Learning that Kô is the owner of a popular bar, Shô goes and the place immediately empties but for Shô and, behind a bar, Kô. The dialogue is blue steel. Short sentences fired like bullets across the empty room. Shô starts:

You've done well.
I can see your heart.
What color is it?
Sky blue.
You're color blind

They talk about time. They talk about how 3 o'clock is many things: a child's snacktime, a woman's toilet break, a bank's closing time. Time for opening a pinball shop. Time, time, time is the fire in which we burn. At 3 o'clock, Shô says, "my body clock gets wounded and starts screeching." He tells Kô how many times he's dreamed of killing him in the last five years. Kô says that at 3 o'clock, it's Shô who's going to be dead and Shô, surprised, sees his own corpse, bleeding out, on the floor behind him. In flashback again (time is slippery in *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands*, so much so it's useless to try to grab hold of it at all) remembers putting the ring he never gave his girl on her dead hand. Kô tells him it was a cheap ring. They make a date to settle things the next day, 3 o'clock sharp. There aren't many exchanges better in the world in the entire decade of the 1960s. Maybe Alexander Jacobs' script for John Boorman's *Point Blank* from the same year holds a candle against it.

Shô returns to his hotel to find a hooker's been provided for him. He roughs her up. He warns her that when his gun gets angry, it'll burn her and she invites him to melt with her. We know about Shô and his gun. All this, from the moment he leaves Saka's apartment and maybe from the moment he discovers his girlfriend's corpse, is Shô's revenge fantasy - his inflation of his own disgraced masculinity as a survival mechanism against his insufferable shame. He holds his gun in his hand as he fucks her, not because he's streetwise, but because he's pathetic. By holding his pistol in his hand, it even raises the question of whether he's just masturbating and not having violent sex with a paid professional. "Don't forget to oil your gun," she reminds him and the prosecution rests. Later, after a shootout in a bar Shô thinks about drinking a whiskey with a fly in it. "I'm about to kill a fly" he says to nobody. But he doesn't. In his fantasy, he's a cold-blooded hitman, a gun for hire with a unique set of skills. In reality, he couldn't harm a fly. As he continues to spiral, Yôsuke's score spirals with him: down, down, down in lower registers and descending scales. Shô finds where they're holding Sae and watches the villains march into view, the cameraman holding his camera in front of his crotch as though it were a metal and glass dildo. Sae? Sae's "asleep" - Sleeping Beauty in the fairytale Shô keeps hoping his life must be. He tries to wake her by shaking her, but everyone knows that's not how you wake sleeping princesses in fairytales. Now there are maggots on the rice and someone got blood on the girl. Now he's in the wasteland again and his watch is broken. It's time to wake up, Shô says, but I don't think he's waking up this time. There's just this film and this projector and a fly caught on the screen like a butterfly formulated in its collector's frame by deadly attention and obsessive love.

Not often counted among the Japanese New Wave, Yamatoya has worked with a few of its key members on some of its most celebrated films. He wrote *Branded to Kill* for Seijun Suzuki, and wrote three others, too (*Tale of Sorrow*, *Capone Cries A Lot*, *The Fang in the Hole*) - doing the same for the great Koji Wakamatsu (*The Violent Virgin*, *Black Narcissus of Lust*, *Notorious Concubines*, *Season of Treason*). His script for *The Violent Virgin* in particular, in which young lovers are abducted by a gang of ruffians while on a picnic, is a showcase for Yamatoya's astonishing fluency with absurdity, anti-narrative, and magic realism. In his mining of the darkest recesses of human sexual shame he predicts Charlie Kaufman - in his

pinpoint satirization of the male sexual ego he reflects both Hitchcock and Fellini. It seems as though I'm going too far, but I wonder if part of the reason he hasn't been held up as an important creative force in the twentieth century is because of the reputation of *pinku eiga* - of the early decades of this Japanese "soft porn" subgenre that has always been for me just an extension of the *Nüberu bāgu* just as the grindhouse is the handmaiden of the American New Wave. They are class distinctions within art without a tangible difference. Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* was Rated X upon its release, remember. There's a prejudice, a puritanical reluctance especially in the United States to regard sexually provocative work as art unless it's delivered under the cover of some middling, reverse-engineered prestige. The fact remains, Yamatoya's work in the 60s and 70s up until he began to delve into anime and kid's television, is towering and intimidating. He treated film like a laboratory and his area of study was the male sexual drive: how it sees, how it looks when enraged, and how it destroys everything around it. Most importantly, his work is largely about how the very *act* of making movies is a form of sexual violence so that watching it is a kind of complicity. Compare his *Wet Sand in August* to Frank Perry's *Last Summer*; his *Tale of Sorrow* to Eastwood's *Play Misty For Me...* Yamatoya is due for a serious critical revision. *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands*, perhaps the very best of this genre of films, is not a bad place to start.

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ATSUSHI YAMATOYA'S INFLATABLE SEX DOLL OF THE WASTELANDS – QUANTUM MECHANICS AND THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS

By

Chris D.

Like his brothers-in-arms, seemingly disparate filmmaking colleagues Koji Wakamatsu and Seijun Suzuki, writer-director Atsushi Yamatoya was, by his own metabolic nature, an outsider. He worked with the aforementioned mavericks throughout his career – which ended prematurely with his death in 1993 at the age of 55 from esophageal cancer.

It remains notoriously difficult to find detailed biographical information on Yamatoya, something not uncommon to even more mainstream, better known Japanese filmmakers. He was born in 1936 in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, a place saddled with freezing temperatures throughout most of the year. He grew up in Tokyo, going to Waseda University and, evidently through his documentary film experience during his time as a student, secured a position at Nikkatsu Studios in 1962 as an assistant director. Perusing the completest Japanese language volume, "Nikkatsu Studios Filmography 1954 – 1971," (which only supplies credits for first assistant directors), I could not find any listings for Yamatoya. This suggests he may have remained a second or third assistant director for his whole four year tenure there, something which could have rankled his ambitions, causing him frustration at ever moving up the ladder. It may shed light on why he left the company in 1966 to pursue work in independent films.

He most certainly met and became friendly with director Seijun Suzuki while still at Nikkatsu, as well as first assistant-soon-to-become-director Yasuharu Hasebe. As a side note offering perspective on assistant directors

rising through the ranks to full blown directorhood in the early 1950s Japanese film industry: Suzuki, himself, had grown enormously frustrated toiling for years post-WW2 at Shochiku Studios as an assistant director, losing hope he would ever helm his own films. When Nikkatsu Studios reopened its doors in 1954 to film production (for the first time since the late 1930s), they guaranteed that qualified personnel would be making their own features within as little as two years. This spurred Suzuki to immediately jump ship from Shochiku. It is telling that less than ten years later, Nikkatsu had seemingly become as stagnant for Yamatoya as Shochiku had been for Suzuki.

It is possible Yamatoya also became acquainted with Koji Wakamatsu when the outlaw maverick briefly became a director for hire at Nikkatsu in 1965. This one-off assignment, solicited because of Wakamatsu's success with his ultra-low budget debut, *Sweet Trap* (*Amai Wana*, 1963), was a chaotic, unhappy association which nevertheless resulted in Wakamatsu's first critically recognized effort, *Secrets Within Four Walls* (*Kabe no Naka no Himegoto*). This disturbing feature about a pressured student cramming for his exams, distracting himself with pornography and peeping on his next door neighbor, resulting in her murder outraged Nikkatsu brass. They likely would have never released the film had not a visiting German programmer scouting movies caught a surreptitious screening and personally asked Wakamatsu to submit it for consideration of inclusion in the Berlin Film Festival. This not only amplified the controversy within Nikkatsu's executive offices, but spread the outrage to the Japan national film board, Eirin, whom Wakamatsu had pointedly ignored. Wakamatsu's *Secrets...* was the only Japanese picture accepted for screening in Berlin that year, bypassing other worthy entries such as Toei Studios' submission, Tomu Uchida's gritty noir masterpiece, *Hunger Straits* (*Kiga Kaikyō* aka *Fugitive from the Past*). This scandal rocked the Japanese film industry for months and is just the kind of thing which would have tickled Yamatoya's funnybone.

1966 was also the year that saw Yamatoya make his directorial debut, *Season of Treason* (*Uragiri no Kiseki*), for Wakamatsu Productions, the saga of a combat photographer returning to Japan from Viet Nam after losing his friend, a fellow shutterbug, in the heat of battle. Plagued with

deep trauma, he sees and enacts the parallels between the war crimes he witnessed and the brutal S&M scenes he encounters in Japan's sleazy underworld of prostitution and dive bars. Screenwriter Yozo Tanaka co-wrote the screenplay with Yamatoya. Some sources list producer Wakamatsu himself as a co-director.

That year also saw the formation of a screenwriting collective with the pseudonymous pen name Guru Hachiro, led by director Seijun Suzuki which consisted of Yamatoya, Yozo Tanaka, Takeo Kimura (Suzuki's favorite Nikkatsu production designer/art director, one of the most senior in the group), assistant director Chusei Sone (who went on to achieve fame directing a number of successful roman porn/pink films at Nikkatsu in the 1970s-'80s) and the lesser known Yutaka Okada, Seiichirō Yamaguchi, and Yasuaki Hangai. Kimura especially helped Suzuki refine and realize his visual compositions in many of his most famous pictures including *Gate of Flesh* (*Nikutai no Mon*, 1964), *Tattooed Life* (*Irezumi Ichidai*, 1965), *Fighting Elegy* (*Kenka Ereji*, 1966) and *Tokyo Drifter* (*Tokyo Nagaremono*, 1966). Kimura reinforced Suzuki's own inclination to take risks with minimal sets and offbeat lighting/color schemes – which paid off – frequently with eyepopping results. Yozo Tanaka would subsequently go on to collaborate on screenplays for Suzuki's most acclaimed later films, the so-called Taisho trilogy: *Zigeunerweisen* (1980), *Kagero-za* (aka *Heat Shimmer Theater*, 1981) and *Yumeji* (1991), while still toiling away in the bread-and-butter salt mines of *pinku eiga*.

Guru Hachiro is the sole screenwriting credit on Seijun Suzuki's most notorious, transgressive film at Nikkatsu, *Branded to Kill* (*Koroshi no Rakuin*), released in 1967. Although it was undoubtedly a collaboration between Suzuki and at least one or two of the other writers in their collective, it has become increasingly clear since the film's release that the primary, driving force behind the nightmarishly absurd narrative was Yamatoya. Yamatoya even sings the melancholic ballad "Killer's Blues" over *Branded to Kill*'s opening credits and end titles!

That same year saw the writing, production and release of Yamatoya's second directorial effort *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* (*Koya no Datchi Waifu* aka *Dutch Wife in the Desert*) for his own short-lived

company, Yamatoya Productions. Note: “Dutch wife” is/was slang for a life-size sex doll toy in Japan. The film also reportedly saw a brief release under the apt – though less fun – moniker, *Horror Doll* (*Kyofu Ningyo*).

Inflatable Sex Doll... was distributed by Kokuei, a prominent purveyor of pink films in the 1960s. Kokuei, a small company supposedly fronted by a man named “Daisuke Asakura,” was in reality run by a savvy businesswoman who believed in Yamatoya, Keiko Sato (b. 1939), who used a pseudonym to be able to compete in the primarily male-dominated pink film industry. (Sato’s career as a producer is remarkable in its own right and readers are encouraged to look into her many other productions.)

Some sources report that another connection to Nikkatsu Studios was filmmaker Yukihiro Sawada, who may have collaborated uncredited with Yamatoya on the *Inflatable Sex Doll...* script. The young, former assistant director Sawada helmed several very good yakuza action films at the studio in the early 1970s, including *Melody of Rebellion* (*Hangyaku no Merodii*, 1970) starring Yoshio Harada and Meiko Kaji and *Attack* (*Kirikomi*, 1970) and *Kanto Society of Leading Mobsters* (*Kanto Kanbukai* aka *Line-Up of Yakuza Big Shots*, 1971), both starring Tetsuya Watari. Sawada also directed the pink yakuza film, *Retreat Through the Wet Wasteland* (*Nureta Koya o Hashire*, 1973), a critically acclaimed effort which generated controversy with its story of five cops extorting and murdering Vietnamese refugees, framing a teen gang, then being exposed when one of the participating detectives who has been committed to an insane asylum escapes and goes on the run.

SPOILERS AHEAD:

There are numerous parallels between *Inflatable Sex Doll of the Wastelands* and Suzuki’s *Branded to Kill*. Both feature hubristic hit men protagonists named Jo (played by Jo Shishido in *Branded...* and Yuichi Minato in *Inflatable...*). (Please note: though Minato’s character is called “Shō” in the English subtitles, the kanji alphabet characters for the “sh” sound can be identical for the “j” sound in the romaji – or roman alphabet letters – and have an identical pronunciation in spoken Japanese – so I refer to him here as “Jo.”). Both films are shot in chiaroscuro black-

and-white cinemascope filled with stark compositions and disjointed editing rhythms. It should be noted that *Inflatable Sex Doll's* anamorphic images are occasionally warped at opposing left and right edges of the frame, indicating either slightly faulty lenses or a potential problem affixing the lenses to the 35mm camera during the shoot. This seems to be accidental, but is nevertheless fortuitous, a collateral effect that enhances the dreamlike quality of the compositions. There are sequences in both movies with cars hurtling through barren landscapes ending at ruined concrete buildings. Both films have violent sexual couplings between the protagonist and various women who have possibly sinister, homicidal motives. Both feature the protagonists being induced to watch crude 16mm home movies sent by the villains to lure the protagonists into rescuing kidnapped nude damsels in distress. Both have hit men protagonists who are insecurely obsessed with their ratings as top-ranked underworld killers. Both films have protagonists undergoing psychotic breaks induced by physical and emotional trauma. In *Branded...* it occurs when Jo's wife (played by Mariko Okada), who has been bedding his employer (Isao Tamagawa), shoots him after Jo has bungled a hit. Because the bullet hits Jo's belt-buckle, he collapses but doesn't die. Once his wife has fled, he escapes from the burning apartment, then wanders in an alcoholic PTSD daze until rescued by a suicidal hitwoman (Annu Mari) who has also been sent to kill him. In *Inflatable Sex Doll...*, we learn through a flashback that hitman Jo – formerly a bartender at his best friend, hit man Kô's (Shohei Yamamoto) bar – has been called on the phone to his fiancée, Sae's apartment as she is being raped/murdered by Kô. He arrives too late. Something which seemingly has turned him into a strutting braggart/killer-for-hire while he passes the time tracking down Kô for revenge. *Inflatable Sex Doll's* narrative ping-pongs back and forth between reality and Jo's possibly Walter Mitty-ish fantasies at such a breakneck pace we, the viewers, are never sure exactly what to believe. Although *Branded to Kill* does this, too, the descent into a warped, absurd 'reality' occurs more gradually, only spinning more and more out-of-control about a third of the way into the narrative. *Inflatable Sex Doll...* throws the viewer into a frightening meat-grinder from the very start until its last frame, frequently delving into flashbacks-within-flashbacks and time-loop switchbacks that recall bad acid trips and prefigure, in classic proto-Lynchian style, more recent parallel reality cinema such as Lynch's own *Inland Empire* (2006).

Midway through *Inflatable Sex Doll...*, there is a classic WTF sequence where we see Kô and his hapless hoodlum flunkies burst through the door of the dive hotel room where Jo is holed up with Kô's mistress, Mina (Miki Watari). Jo is pouring himself a drink and whirls with his revolver as Kô throws his knife. The hoodlums freeze in place, and the image fades quickly to black. Jo wakes up and dresses next day, leaving Mina asleep, then seemingly fulfills his promise to meet Kô at his bar to redeem the kidnapped mistress of Jo's employer. Jo singlehandedly defeats Kô and his men, beating Kô mercilessly as he coerces him to lead him to the kidnapped girl. A long sequence ensues at Kô's dilapidated warehouse HQ and porn (snuff?) film studio, Jo dispatching more henchmen, finally killing injured Kô, then finding the kidnapped, comatose girl Rie – who has come to resemble Jo's dead girlfriend, Sae (Noriko Tatsumi). But we see in a panning close-up that Rie/Sae seems to be nothing more than a sex doll. Cutting back to Jo's hotel room, we see Jo dying, Kô's knives protruding from his wrists and Kô and flunkies reprimanding Mina as she sits in bed, while she berates them as nothing more than animals. It appears that all of the preceding sequence of Jo rescuing Rie/Sae and killing Kô and his henchmen at the warehouse was only Jo's fantasy – a literally split-second daydream where time stood still, taking place as Kô's knives flew through the air about to penetrate Jo's flesh.

To confuse viewers of both films even more, there is also a top-ranked killer named Kô in *Branded to Kill* – although we only glimpse him once in a medium-long shot, running, screaming and on fire after Jo has torched the inside of Kô's sand dune concrete bunker. Is this possibly some kind of in-joke between Suzuki and Yamatoya and meant to be the same Kô character from *Inflatable Sex Doll...*? Who knows? Maybe. You be the judge. Then there is Jo's neurotic obsession in *Inflatable Sex Doll...* with the hour of 3 o'clock, supposedly the time his girlfriend Sae was murdered by Kô. The time is referenced repeatedly throughout the film. And yes, there are *also* references to the hour of 3 o'clock in *Branded...*, though much less pointedly and, by my count, only twice! Hah!

Noted Japanese free jazz pioneer Yôsuke Yamashita supplied the memorable, effective atonal soundtrack. However there are several passages featuring mournful violas and cello that are similar to sequences

in *Branded to Kill*'s score by Naozumi Yamamoto. Which came first? The chicken or the egg? We'll probably never know.

Yamatoya only directed two more feature films before returning exclusively to writing: *The Pistol That Sprouted Hair* (*Ke no Heita Kenju*, 1968) starring Wakamatsu regular Ken Yoshizawa and *Trap of Lust* (*Aiyoku no Wana*, 1973). The latter is a very loose, shot-in-color, pink remake of *Branded to Kill* with added screenplay input by the previously mentioned Yozo Tanaka. Unfortunately, for this viewer, it proved an uneven watch. The narrative is much more linear than *Branded...* and its primary focus of interest is whenever a nightmarish duo of killers appear on the scene – one is a silent, cloaked tall man and the other, clown-faced Mario, his talkative, dwarf-sized ventriloquist dummy, taunting the lead anti-hero played by Genjiro Arato (Note: actor Arato not only produced this remake but also went on to produce Seijun Suzuki's Taisho trilogy, *Zigeunerweisen*, *Kagero-za* and *Yumeji*!!).

The performances in *Inflatable Sex Doll...* are actually quite good. Yuichi Minato as Jo/ Shô was a familiar face in pink films in the mid-to-late 1960s. His restless, tightly-wound persona suggests a bantam rooster uncomfortable in its own skin, itching for conflict. Among his many credits: the sleaze noir *Fancy Footwork* (*Kinjirareta Tekunikku*, 1966), directed by Kan Mukai about a boxer on the run from the mob; the eerie and disturbing sleaze horror/noir *Madame O* (*Zoku Akutokui: Joi-hen*, 1967) directed by Seiichi Fukuda about a female doctor getting revenge on men in general for her gang rape as a teenager, which had resulted in a syphilis infection; Koji Wakamatsu's pink yakuza noir *Naked Bullet* (*Hadaka no Judan*, 1969), Yamatoya's color remake of *Branded to Kill*, *Trap of Lust* (*Aiyoku no Wana*, 1973) as well as several of Takashi Miike's early films, including *Fudoh: The New Generation* (*Gokudo Sengokushi: Fudo*, 1996), *Full Metal Yakuza* (*Full Metal Gokudo*, 1997) and *Dead or Alive: Birds* (*Dead or Alive 2: Tobosha*, 2000).

Noriko Tatsumi as Sae was actually one of the most famous female performers in 1960s pink films, but she has little to do in *Inflatable Sex Doll...* other than look dead or comatose. Some of her other prominent credits of that era were director Mamoru Watanabe's sleaze noir, *Slave*

Widow (Dorei Mibojin, 1967), Wakamatsu's pink film satire of Shohei Imamura's *A Man Vanishes* called *Vagabond of Sex* (*Sei no Horo*, 1967), Kinya Ogawa's pink yakuza film *Trembling White Breasts* (*Shiroi Chibusa no Senritsu*, 1970), Wakamatsu's chronicle of hereditary evil, *The Hateful Beast* (*Nihon Boko Ankokushi: Onju*, 1970) and Mamoru Watanabe's pink *ninkyo* yakuza opus, *Woman Hell Song – Bamboo Flute Benten* (*Onna Jigoku Uta – Shakuhachi Benten*, 1970). Miki Watari, as previously mentioned, fares the best as far as female performances here. She certainly has the most screen time. But she shows only one other credit online, Wakamatsu's oddly-titled crime film, *Orgy* (*Ranko*) which was also shot and released in 1967.

Shohei Yamamoto is Jo/Shô's nemesis, Kô, and an extremely charismatic presence. I find it surprising that he never achieved a higher profile in mainstream Japanese cinema. He did continue to work regularly in pink films, TV series and straight-to-video cinema up until ten years before his death in 2019 at the age of 81. Another of Yamamoto's prominent credits from the 1960s is Koji Wakamatsu's seemingly impossible to find erotic sci-fi/crime opus *The Love Robots* (*Shiro no Jinzo Bijo*, 1966), a film that reportedly got a dubbed-into-English language release. He also had a supporting role in Teruo Ishii's infamous *Orgies of Edo* (*Zankoku Ijo Gyakutai Monogatari: Genroku Onna Keizu*, 1969).

Last but not least, let us sing the praises of Masayoshi Nogami who plays Naka, the shady, deceptively cheerful, bowtie-wearing real estate mogul who hires Jo/ Shô to rescue his girlfriend Rie (Mari Nagisa) and exterminate the gang who has abducted her. Nogami has an astounding 500 + credits on IMDb, and he appears to have worked nonstop right until his death in 2010. His smiling, patronizing Naka is the epitome of the oily huckster who is everyone's best friend to their face, but may be plotting their demise as soon as they turn their backs. His Naka seems an amused host greeting lost souls as they enter hell, building up their egos and confidence before he plummets them back into an inferno of perpetually re-lived bad decisions. Nogami also was a veteran of numerous Wakamatsu productions, including *Resume of Love Affairs* (*Joji no Rerikisho* aka *Career of Lust*, 1965), *Black Narcissus of Lust* (*Joyoku no Kuro Suisen*, 1966), *Abnormal Blood* (*Nihon Boko Ankokushi: Ijosh*

no Chi, 1967) as well as Tetsuji Takechi's ultra-controversial *Black Snow* (*Kuroi Yuki*, 1965) and Mamoru Watanabe's *Slave Widow* (1967).

After *Inflatable Sex Doll...*, Yamatoya became one of director Wakamatsu's recurrent writing partners in the late 1960s. Wakamatsu, even more often than Suzuki, signed many of his screenplays under a pseudonym: Izuru Deguchi. This nom de plume frequently represented Wakamatsu's collaborations with notorious underground director and United Red Army member, Masao Adachi. But Yamatoya also penned several films under that name, including Wakamatsu's very good sleaze noirs, *Naked Bullet* (*Hadaka no Judan*) and *Violent Virgin* (*Shojo Geba Geba*), both from 1969. Yamatoya returned briefly as a writer to Nikkatsu, scripting the best of the five film *Stray Cat Rock* series with Meiko Kaji, *Stray Cat Rock – Sex Hunter* (*Nora Nako Rokku – Sekkusu Hantaa*) directed by Yasuharu Hasebe in 1970. He also scripted the bizarre pink *sukeban* take on *The Seven Samurai*, *Naked Seven* (*Sengoku Rokku – Hayate no Onnatachi*) with Hasebe directing in 1974. Yamatoya scripted one of the best *sukeban* type films at Toei Studios in 1973, *Ranking Boss Rock* (*Bankaku Rokku*), a one-off directed by Makoto Naito starring the woefully underrated Emiko Yamauchi.

Yamatoya reunited with maestro Seijun Suzuki for several more writing collaborations, notably the features *A Tale of Sorrow and Sadness* (*Hishu Monogatari*, 1977) starring Kyoko Enami and Yoshio Harada, and *Capone Cries A Lot* (*Kapone Oi Ni Naku*, 1985), plus the unforgettable *A Fang in the Hole*, starring Yoshio Harada, a 46 minute episode of a television horror anthology series in 1979. Yamatoya finally found his niche writing for several anime television series in the 1980s and made his living penning episodes for such programs as “Lupin the Third,” “Tomorrow’s Joe,” and “Cat’s Eye” until his premature death. Yamatoya also collaborated on the screenplay for the final feature film by director Toshio Matsumoto (whose most famous work remains *Funeral Parade of Roses*, 1969), a Taisho era psychological horror tale, *Dogra Magra* (1988). – Chris D.

Chris D. is the author of “Gun and Sword: An Encyclopedia of Japanese Gangster Films 1955 – 1980”, “Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film” and several works of crime fiction. His mammoth “The Humanity of Femmes Fatales and Heartless Villains – International Noir and Beyond Genre” is scheduled for publication by Poison Fang Books before the end of 2025. Chris served as a co-programmer between 1999 – 2009 at the American Cinematheque in Hollywood, CA, and taught film genre history classes at Academy of Art University in San Francisco from 2009 – 2013. He is also a musician, still active as the singer/songwriter of the bands, The Flesh Eaters, Divine Horsemen and the newly formed Poison Fang Society.







Interview with Keiko Satô of Kokuei Films

The following is a transcript of a video interview conducted with producer Keiko Satô of Kokuei Films, conducted by producer Hiromi Aihara of Bewiz (TETSUO II: BODY HAMMER). Our deep thanks to Hiromi Aihara and Stefan Holl of Rapid Eye Movies for permission to include this here:

Hiromi Aihara (HA): Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview, which you do not usually undertake. Stefan is also pleased.

Keiko Satô (KS): I have known Stefan Holl for about 10 years now, which is a long time since he bought my pink films in the beginning.

HA: Why did you start working on pink films?

KS: I didn't start working in pink films because I was interested in pink films, it just happened to be pink films. I was an office worker at a rigid company called Hitachi, Ltd. in 1964. Kazuyuki Yagen, son of the founder of Kokuei, who was a friend of mine at the time, joined Kokuei, and screened "Sexy Route 66" (short/US), and more than a dozen Kokuei employees including the president were arrested for displaying obscene materials. Five of my friends (including myself, who worked for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and a securities company) started helping the remaining employees, and eventually all five of them joined Kokuei. I joined the company when I was told that the salary for a college graduate at that time was ¥14,800 and they would give me ¥20,000.

HA: When did the production of pink films begin?

KS: Kokuei originally produced educational films for elementary schools. At that time, they were not called pink films, but at regular Japanese film screenings in rural areas, they often showed short sexy films, and I decided to try to produce a film like "Sexy Route 66" in Japan. The first film I made was *Cave of Lust* (1963/directed by Kôji Seki). At a time when women's skin was never shown, I made a female Tarzan film that exposed all but the bust and waist. Director Kôji Seki was originally an animal film director,

and I asked Seki to make the film because he needed animals in his Tarzan films. Pink films began in earnest in 1963, so they had started before I joined Kokuei. The founder of Kokuei was a former financier who lent money to screen imported films that he took as collateral, and was even investigated by the government for unauthorized screenings.

HA: How did the name “pink film” originate?

KS: At that time, they were called “sexy films” or “different color films,” not “pink films.” Mr. Minoru Murai, who was in the cultural department of the Naigai Times, and Mr. Kanai of Daily Sports were in and out of Kokuei, and Mr. Murai started calling them “pink films” in response to the Blue-Ribbon Awards.

[HA: Since 1950 the Tokyo Film Press Association has selected the winners of the Blue-Ribbon Awards. This organization was started by volunteers, but now, it is made up of film reporters from seven Tokyo-based sports newspapers. Since this award was for a general film, Murai ironically named it “Pink film”, in contrast to Blue.]

HA: Were other companies already producing pink films at that time?

KS: Former employees of Okura Pictures and Kokuei founded a company called Nippon Cinema, which started producing pink films, and as soon as they realized that it was profitable, about 50 companies started producing pink films. At first, it was enough to produce and screen five or six films a year. Kokuei produced films at its Tokyo headquarters and also showed them at its branches in Osaka, Nagoya, Kyushu, and Hokkaido, generating enough income to support about 100 employees.

HA: What was the first pink film that you produced?

KS: I was good friends with Kaoru Umezawa, who was an assistant director to Koji Wakamatsu, and he wanted me to be the producer of Umezawa's first film. I was also good friends with Nakao Sone, who worked at Nikkatsu, so I asked Sone to write the script and in 1965, Umezawa decided to direct *Moan of a Teenager* which marked my debut

as a producer. At that time, I could spend more time on production and there were no restrictions. I could afford to stay at inns and write scripts. When I joined Kokuei, I was not a producer, but a production clerk. There were two other producers besides myself, but all of their credits are listed as Daisuke Asakura.

HA: How did you come up with the name “Daisuke Asakura”?

KS: We could not use a woman's name because there were very few women in the industry at that time. Three producers consulted with each other and decided on the name Daisuke Asakura, which was a character for “I love you in the morning” because it was a pink movie. Also, I used to admire a certain teacher and wanted to become a teacher in the future, and I didn't want my name to be seen when that teacher came to see a pink film.

HA: How many films have you produced yourself?

KS: About 500 to 600 films? I have never counted them. I think that the total number of films produced by Kokuei as a whole is about 1,500 to 1,600. There are many of those films that no longer remain today -- about 1,000 pink films have been disposed of.

HA: What are some of your most memorable films?

KS: I am often asked what my favorite film is, but I don't have one. I don't have a favorite film either. I can't decide because I am still working in the field. *Belly Button of the Sun* (1965, directed by Koji Wakamatsu) was an overseas location film that cost 8 million yen (about 100 million yen today) at a time when the average budget was 3 million yen. The company had no money left, so we asked several theaters to pay the screening fee in advance to raise the budget. In the 1970s, pink films were so profitable that the tax office was sure to target them.

HA: Can you share any memories as a producer?

KS: When I started, I didn't know anything. Kaoru Umezawa asked me

to help him because he was having trouble with sound negative. I didn't know what sound negative meant and asked a senior colleague at Nippon Cinema, who told me "I don't know either, so you go ask someone." I contacted a friend at Toei and finally found out what it was. I was also told to change the title of the film "A high school girl stays out without permission" because the high school girl might be under 18 years old.

Because it was a pink film, there were sex-related words in it, but I was still young and had no idea what they were. The industry used words such as "like-molestation" and "married woman-like," and I couldn't understand the difference between "like-masturbation" and "like-petting" at all.

HA: Director Koji Wakamatsu's films *Secrets Behind the Walls* (1965) and *United Red Army* (2007) were both selected for the Berlin International Film Festival.

KS: In those days, any film could get an audience. So it was a time when theaters allowed advance payment. It is true that we lost money on the Hawaii location film, which cost 8 million yen.

HA: Did you hear words you didn't understand when you were reading a script?

KS: I pretended to know, because as a producer it would be unseemly to ask. But I was easily recognized. Banmei Takahashi used to say to me, "Sister, you don't know, do you?" I was often told, "You don't know, do you, sister?"

*Keiko Satô is known in the industry as "big sister."

HA: What were some of the challenges of being a female producer?

KS: I think it was the directors who had a hard time with me being a woman. When I was in my twenties and not as old as I am now, every time I produced a film by one of the directors who were older than me, such as Koji Wakamatsu, Hiroshi Mukai, or Mamoru Watanabe, who were in the heyday of pink films (the first generation), the other directors would

get jealous. They would say, “Are you working with that guy?” I thought I should not date anyone, so I stayed single. However, all the directors in my heyday were very fond of me. The second generation of directors were all close in age to me, and included such directors as Atsushi Yamatoya, Kaoru Umezawa, and Masao Adachi. From the third generation, such as Banmei Takahashi, they were younger directors.

HA: What process did you use to decide which projects to produce?

KS: First, we received the scripts, and then I selected the films to be produced with the other two producers (Kazuyuki Yagen and Shunsuke Nao). At that time, there were no word processors, so those with the best scripts benefited from having beautiful handwriting. Banmei Takahashi had beautiful handwriting. When he was shooting 12 films a year, each month had a specific genre, such as this month's thing. I would post it on my desk, and the directors would look at the schedule and bring me scripts that were appropriate for that genre. If a lot of projects came up, I inevitably chose the scripts that I liked. I did not choose a script that had to be naughty because it was a pink film. When I calculated that Banmei Takahashi's script had four sex scenes in a 100-minute film, or simply one sex scene every 25 minutes, he was offended and said, “You can't do math with it.” Anyway, my priority was to make the script interesting. *Inflatable Sex Doll in the Wastelands* (1967, dir. Atsushi Yamatoya), for example, has almost no sex scenes. The scripts that were discarded were cut up and used as notepaper, and many directors were saddened when they realized that their scripts were used as notepaper.

HA: Did you get any complaints from audiences looking for sexually explicit films?

KS: No one complained at the time; up until the 1980s, pink films had an audience anyway. When adult videos started to appear, pink films started to compete with them, and many of them became more extreme than adult films. It is our fault that pink films became boring. In adult videos, the only set needed was a bed, and only sex scenes need to be shown, but in pink films, there was drama. Theaters are now demanding more adult-oriented films, and pink films have changed. However, I was a stubborn

person, and from the late 1980s, theaters began to dislike Kokuei films because they were difficult to understand, dark, and sexless.

HA: The fourth generation began in the late 80s, and directors known as “the Four Heavenly Kings” (Hisayasu Sato, Toshiaki Satō, Takahisa Zeze, and Kazuhiro Sano) emerged. When did you first meet director Zeze?

KS: A good feature of pink films is that senior directors help junior assistant directors. Shuji Kataoka pulled up Zeze, who had been assistant director to directors such as Yojiro Takita, Shuji Kataoka, and Hiroshi Mukai, saying, “His films can only be made at Kokuei.” Even today, this characteristic of pink films continues. Zeze’s scripts were interesting, but they were not pink films. At Kokuei, it was decided that the debut film would be a “like-molestation” film. These four directors’ films did not draw many customers. No matter what kind of director I am, I like and have feelings for my debut film the best. There were many cases where a senior encouraged a junior and said, “Sister, I want him to make the next film,” and the debut was decided.

HA: Can you talk about creating a screenplay?

KS: First, I let the director write the story. If there is something interesting at some point, that is enough, so I ask the scriptwriter to put the story together. When Rei Sakamoto wrote her first debut story at the age of 25, she consulted with her senior, Shinji Imaoka, but was unable to make any progress. I have been touched many times by the kindness of my seniors.

HA: Can you talk about the relationship between the Director and Assistant Director and characteristics of Kokuei films?

KS: My sense tells me that this director will work with this assistant director. I also decide the timing of the director’s debut based on my own instincts. This may be a characteristic of Kokuei that other pink film companies do not have. I am very happy that there are many successful directors who have moved on from pink films to general films. Kokuei also made an effort to submit its films to overseas film festivals.



HA: In the process of developing the project, did you ever think that you were lucky to be a woman?

KS: There were reactions from people around me, but I never thought about it myself. There were some requests for interviews from the media when they found out that a female producer was making a pink film, but I always refused, saying “No, because a school teacher is coming,” and it never came to the surface. Often, Kokuei’s films win awards at pink film industry awards, and in such cases, I sometimes take the stage. I am surprised when people call me “Daisuke Asakura” and ask me to come to the podium. Once there was a Fuji Television project featuring the Four Heavenly Kings, and I was told that the project would not be completed without my appearance, so I asked Ren Osugi to narrate my own words.

HA: Director Kōji Seki made a 3D sex film *Perverted Criminal* in the 1960’s. Were you involved in that?

KS: That was produced by Nihon Cinema, so I was not involved. Director Seki’s films do not suit my taste, so I am not involved in them.

HA: Who set the basic budget for a pink film, which was 3 to 5 million yen, shooting, and editing in one week?

KS: There were no rules in the early days, but budgets were set when the various film companies began to take into account the need to make a profit, but Kokuei did not have many stipulations. There was a stipulation that the film had to be CinemaScope and 35mm. In the film industry, which was shifting from 1.85 to CinemaScope, Kokuei’s pink films stuck to CinemaScope until the end, and when they switched from 35mm to videography, I thought, “My work is done.” My first digital videography film was *1Br Love Hotel* (2013, dir. Yutaka Onishi), produced by Kazuto Morita, and my last 35mm film was *Underwater Love (Onna no Kappa)* (2011, dir. Shinji Imaoka).

[Kazuto Morita, who was present for the interview, interjected with these thoughts:

KM: When film shooting became obsolete and the budget of other companies dropped to about 2 million yen, only Kokuei went against the times and doubled its budget to 5 million yen, out of the determination of the older sister [Sato]. We knew that it would be difficult to recoup the investment, so we asked for cooperation from TV stations and other organizations. I would like you to know that Kokuei was determined to make a good pink film as long as the big sister was around. Even now in the digital age, we are still making films in line with her wishes. Since the days of the "Four Heavenly Kings," she was always fighting about the cost of production. Many of today's filmmakers grew up watching the films of Kokuei. I want them to understand that it was your sister who brought up those directors.]

HA: Did you ever have fights with directors?

KS: We had fights like throwing ashtrays at each other. I once had an argument with the director after realizing I had shot a film that had the same content as a film made by another company. There was also a lot of cursing. Until about 10 years ago, there were scenes of fighting and getting down on one's knees to the cameraman, but that has disappeared in this day and age.

HA: Are there other women on the staff of pink films?

KS: There are women cameramen, but not producers. A director may play the role of a producer on set, but I think I am the only female producer in the pink film industry who takes the overall direction of a film. It is not easy to make money from theaters and negotiate prices when selling to TV and video companies, etc. without experience.

HA: When is film to be shown in a general movie theater instead of a pink movie theater?

KS: When a film that has already been screened in a pink cinema is

to be screened in a general cinema, the scenario title should be used. Conversely, for screenings at pink cinemas, we use titles that are typical of pink films. It was because of this that the general public began to see the works of the four directors and they became successful. If a film is screened at an international film festival, it becomes easier for it to be screened in general cinemas.

HA: What restrictions other than budget were there in the production of pink films?

KS: We were instructed to put in a few teasing (sexually explicit) scenes, but other than that, there were no other restrictions, so there were times when theaters complained about Kokuei's films. There were times when screenings, which usually lasted from one week to ten days, were cancelled after only three days. Shinji Imaoka's debut film, *Kemonotachi no seien: Iku toki, issho* (1995), was also cancelled after only three days. In such cases, the director was determined to sell the film to other media that were not pink cinemas. Mitsuru Onaike's film was also cancelled in the same way. When his films were cancelled, he was told by the distribution company not to make such films, but when they told him not to, he immediately made a new film in reaction. When a director makes his debut, he is required to make at least three films.

[Kazuto Morita, who was present at the interview, interjected again with these thoughts:

KM: Even if a director failed in business, she [Sato] would produce the next film, and she would intentionally use the director of a film about which she had whispered, "I don't like this film," for the next project. By doing so, she hoped that the next film would overcome something that had failed in the previous film, and she always gave them a chance. Director Takahisa Zeze and Director Toshiki Sato are great directors, but I don't think they would be where they are today if their older sister hadn't nurtured them. I think she is the only one who could have nurtured a director with such a habitual personality. I can't do it.

HA: Was it difficult to work with the directors of the Four Heavenly Kings?

KS: The Four Heavenly Kings were said to be troublesome directors, but I didn't find them troublesome; three of them were type B and one was type AB, so it was easy for me to just leave them alone. I was surprised when Takahisa Zeze wanted to do lesbian stuff. Hisayasu Sato was a director who grew through praise. I don't think I nurtured the directors, I just walked with them.

HA: Were there many restrictions in the early days of pink films?

KS: At that time, we were only allowed to show from the bust up. Then things gradually changed, but there were restrictions imposed by the Motion Picture Code of Ethics, such as not showing the crack of the buttocks. Nowadays, hair is allowed, and there are fewer restrictions, but the regulations change every year depending on the inspector. They inspect the titles of both pink films and general films.

HA: Many of the films you produce are stimulating and challenging. Is that because you intentionally let young directors challenge themselves?

KS: I just choose scripts that I like. Even if the script I write at the beginning is not very good, if there is one core idea in the story and I have a feeling that it will lead to an interesting film, I give the OK. I can't explain it theoretically, but I have been making films with confidence in my own feeling. I often get angry at young directors, but I also reflect on how I was when I was their age. I feel that my thinking has not changed with age. My interest in everything has not changed since then, and people around me always tell me I am young. Young directors also engage in normal conversation with me, and I don't think they are aware of my age (77 years old at the time of the interview). Being a director is not only a matter of ability, but also of luck.

HA: What are your memories of the three films that will be screened at the Berlin International Film Festival [after this interview]?

Gushing Prayer (Funshutsu kigan - 15-sai no baishunfu) (1971/Directed by Masao Adachi)

Masao Adachi is one year older than me, but he has a sharp look in his eyes when he plays mahjong, etc. I liked this look and teamed up with him. I liked his seriousness and delinquent attitude.

Inflatable Sex Doll in the Wastelands (1967/Directed by Atsushi Yamatoya)

It is amazing that the film was shot in CinemaScope. I went to see the filming at the foot of Mt. Fuji, and the director is an unusual person whose point of view is totally different from others: 1+1 becomes 5 instead of 2.

Abnormal Family: Older Brother's Bride (1984/Directed by Masayuki Suo)

When I asked him to write a screenplay, he wrote more than 300 pages of 400 characters, so I said, "How are you going to do this in a one-hour movie? We shot the film using a set that was about to be demolished, so we had to shorten the screenplay to 180 pages. The film is a pink film, but it is a home drama. When I saw that the credits were written in poor handwriting, I thought there would be no customers, but unexpectedly it was a success and I made a lot of money. This is the only pink film Suo has made, and he became famous soon after this film.





Notes on the Restoration

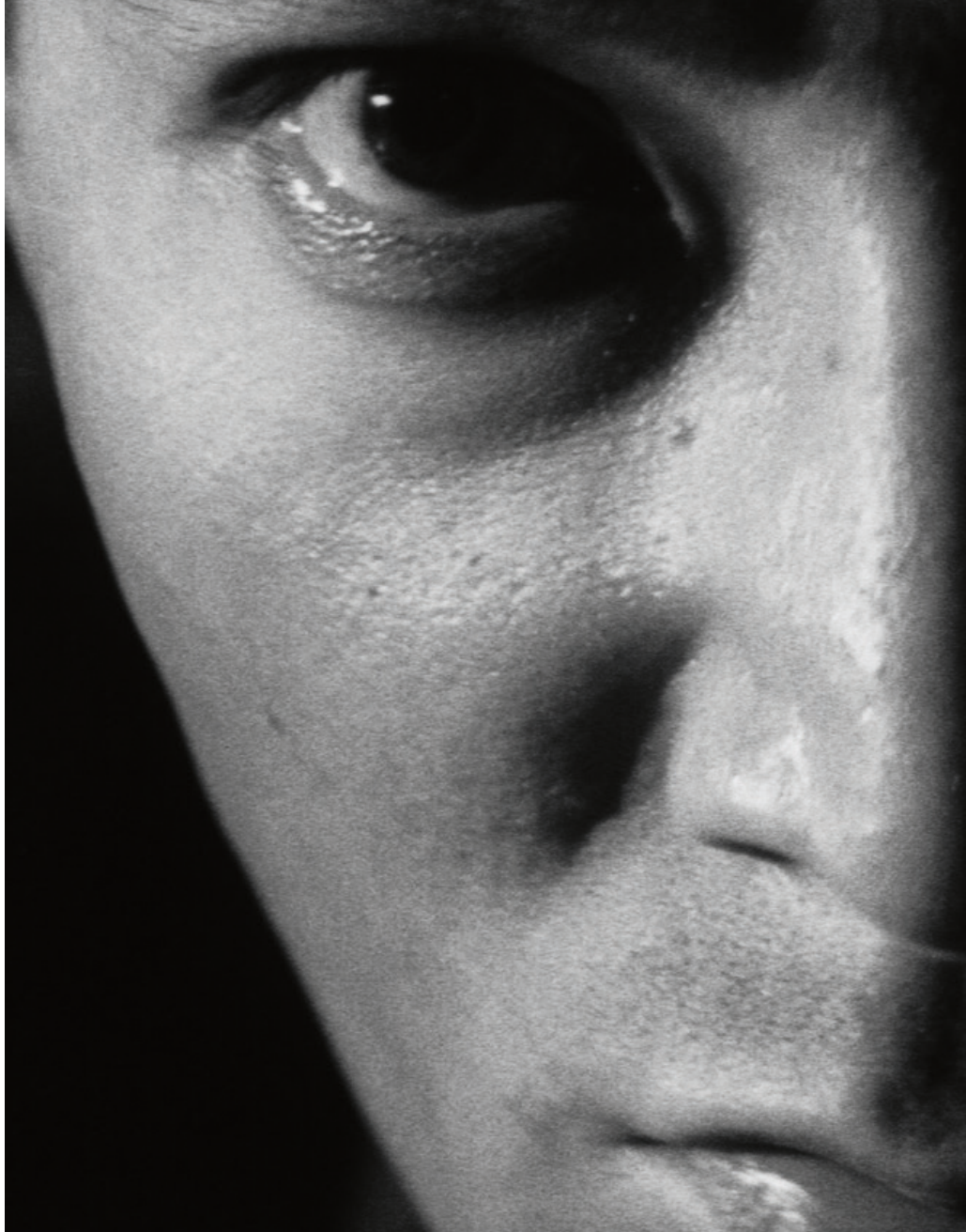
INFLATABLE SEX DOLL OF THE WASTELANDS was restored from the only known remaining 35mm element - a badly worn and damaged release print, scanned by Rapid Eye Movies in Germany.

Before restoration work could begin, the piece-meal scan of bits and pieces of that tattered print needed to be put back together (conformed) - both the audio and picture separately and then synced. That's an undertaking all its own. Once we had that, we could really dig in and see just what kind of work was ahead of us.

The print was damaged with numerous broken and even missing frames. As would be expected from a worn release print, there were *considerable* scratches and dirt present and large tape splices needed to be digitally repaired at each cut. There were considerable stability issues throughout. Large sections of the film had significant moisture damage which presents itself on screen as a wildly irregular "flicker". The audio was equally challenging and well beyond our in-house audio restoration abilities. It was time to call in the audio pros at Audio Mechanics in Burbank, CA. They did a heroic job clearing up the audio, fixing badly out of sync shots and miraculously removing a loud repetitive noise that ran throughout a large portion of the film.

An element in this condition would normally never be used for a restoration effort, but in this case it was the only element known to exist and the film deserves to be seen in the best possible condition it can.

Conform and grading was performed by Tyler Fagerstrom.
Picture restoration was done by Craig Rogers for Deaf Crocodile.
Audio restoration was performed by Audio Mechanics.



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